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Senate

The Senate met at 1 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Our Father in Heaven, You keep us from stumbling and falling. We trust Your power. We sing of Your steadfast love and proclaim Your faithfulness to all generations. Make us one Nation, truly wise with righteousness, exalting us in due season.

Today, inspire our lawmakers to walk in the light of Your countenance. Abide with them so that Your wisdom will influence each decision they make. Keep them from the evil that brings grief, enabling them to avoid the pitfalls that lead to ruin. Lord, empower them to glorify You in all they say and do.

We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CORNYN). The President pro tempore is recognized.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to, please, have 1 minute in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

117TH CONGRESS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, today is Sunday, and I want to remember what Senator Byrd said on a lot of Sundays when the Senate was in session. He didn't say this because he didn't want to work on Sunday, but he

wanted everybody to remember the significance of Sunday for some people, particularly Christians. He always said: "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy."

Now, I want to refer to another particular Sunday. Never in the Senate's history has the Senate convened Congress—meaning a new Congress—on a Sunday. The Constitution mandates that Congress convene at noon on January 3, unless the preceding Congress, by law, designates a different day.

Of course, January 3 has fallen on a Sunday over the last 238 years, and each time, by unanimous consent, the Congress set a new convening day other than that Sunday. So now it appears, for the first time in history, that Senate Democrats don't want to agree to such unanimous consent and instead are insisting that the Senate start the 117th Congress on Sunday.

I am not looking to get out of work. I have proven that I have respect for attendance in the Senate. But out of respect, the Senate usually does not have business on religious holidays observed by members of various faiths.

So just like Senator Byrd, I also think the Lord's Day, particularly when it is paired with the weight of starting a new Congress, deserves reverence.

I yield.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, our bipartisan, bicameral discussions on another major pandemic rescue package continued all night and this morning. We are winnowing down the remaining differences. I believe I can speak for all sides when I say I hope and expect to have a final agreement nailed down in a matter of hours.

Yesterday evening, our Democratic colleagues agreed to important language authored by Senator TOOMEY. Back in March, in the CARES Act, Congress funded several new emergency lending facilities to be operated by the Federal Reserve. Their purpose was simple: to backstop the basic foundations of our economy and prevent any kind of sweeping financial paralysis.

Our actions worked. The other historic relief that Congress passed, combined with the existence of these lending facilities staved off systemic collapse. American workers and families still need much more help, but a total financial meltdown never materialized.

These new emergency lending facilities were always intended to sunset at the end of this year. Senator TOOMEY and our Democratic colleagues have landed on compromise language that ensures this will, in fact, happen.

It also redirects the dormant money in these accounts toward the urgent needs of working Americans and ensures that these expired programs cannot be simply restarted or cloned without another authorization from Congress, all while preserving both the independence of the Federal Reserve and the proper authority of Congress. It is yet another example of good-faith bipartisan collaboration that has defined our discussions all week.

At this point, we are down to the last few differences that stand between struggling Americans and the major rescue package they need and deserve.

These days and nights of negotiations have been encouraging, but our citizens need this waiting game to be over. Yesterday alone, another 3,388 of my fellow Kentuckians tested positive for the coronavirus. The virus continues to spread throughout our country. Thousands of Americans are being robbed of their lives on a daily basis.

And while the resilience of the American people have brought along our economic recovery faster than expected, it will remain both insufficient

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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and tenuous until the vaccines that will end this fight have been distributed all across the Nation.

For months—literally months—Senate Republicans have been calling for another targeted package to reopen the job-saving Paycheck Protection Program, extend Federal unemployment benefits, fund K-12 schools, fund vaccine distribution, and get a lot more help onto the frontlines as fast as possible. I am relieved that we appear to be just hours away from legislation that will finally do that.

When we get this done, Congress will not deserve any special praise, not with this relief having waited until late December and not with some of our Democratic colleagues openly saying the reason they finally changed their tuned was that they finally got a President-elect of their own party. When we finalize this measure and pass it, Congress will only have done our job. We will have finally done our duty in getting more relief to those who need it most.

Let's make today the day we join together, put differences aside, and finally get it done.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Brian Noland, of Tennessee, to be a Member of the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority for a term expiring May 18, 2024.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now, we have spent the past 4 to 5 days locked in intense bipartisan negotiations over the final details of an emer-

gency relief package. There are a few issues outstanding, but I am quite hopeful that we are closing in on an outcome. It appears that, barring a major mishap, the Senate and House will be able to vote on final legislation as early as tonight—tonight.

Many of the provisions in this bill are already public. They are all items that the country desperately needs and upon which there is no disagreement. We all are ready to deliver a desperately needed extension of enhanced unemployment benefits; direct survival checks to millions of American families; crucial relief to our schools, our small businesses, our healthcare system; and funding to support the production and distribution of a vaccine.

As of yesterday, we have been steadily working through all of the other outstanding issues, but one issue threatened to derail the bill. The Senator from Pennsylvania made an eleventh-hour demand to curtail the authority of the Fed to respond to economic crises, potentially leaving the Fed with less authority than it had even prior to the pandemic.

The language in his provision was so broad, the intent seemed to be to sabotage the incoming administration's ability to stabilize the economy and save jobs. That was completely unacceptable to Democrats.

But late last night the logjam was broken. Senator TOOMEY accepted my compromise to remove the dangerous "similar to" language in his bill that was overly broad. We sent the Senator far more limited language around 8 p.m. last night, and it was accepted a few hours later with a few technical changes. As a result, the Federal Reserve will retain its tools and authority in the event of a true emergency.

Now, this compromise should not have taken as long as it did, and, frankly, it was irresponsible to threaten the entire package with this ideological attempt to limit the Fed and Treasury's powers in an emergency.

But I am very glad that our Republican colleagues relented and accepted our offer. The Toomey legislation was the last significant stumbling block to a bipartisan agreement moving forward.

Solving our disagreement over the Fed's authority was a key to unlocking the rest of the bill and putting us on a path to final legislation. Now that we have solved that disagreement, we can close in on a final agreement, finish drafting legislation, and move it through both Chambers of Congress—hopefully, as soon as tonight. As we speak, the legislative text is being finalized.

The time has come to move forward and reach a conclusion. The legislation that is coming together will put money in the pockets of everyday people and extend many of the benefits that we included in the CARES Act, a bill I was proud to negotiate with Secretary Mnuchin.

I will be the first to admit that, while this short-term deal is necessary

to meet the urgent and growing needs that so many people are facing immediately going into the winter, this bill is not sufficient. It is necessary. It is not sufficient.

Democrats would have liked to provide more relief, especially to State and local governments and especially to American families on the brink of financial collapse. The survival checks in this bill are a good start, but there was bipartisan support for \$1,200 checks.

So let me be clear about one thing: This bill will not be the final word on congressional COVID relief.

When this Chamber gavels back in 2021, we must pick up immediately where we left off. We must protect people's jobs, whether they work for a company or a local government; whether they live in blue States or red States; whether they are office employees or teachers, bus drivers and firefighters.

Still, the significance of this package should not be underestimated. We will deliver the second largest Federal stimulus in our Nation's history. Only the CARES Act will have been bigger. This package will give the new President a head start as he prepares to right our ailing economy. And it won't include any provision to limit the legal rights of workers who are put in harm's way. It won't include any provision to gratuitously limit the authority of the Fed.

On many issues, where Republicans once refused to grant an inch, we were also able to make meaningful steps forward. Republicans, in their initial proposal, wanted zero direct payments. They wanted zero unemployment insurance. They wanted zero rent relief. Only a few months ago, the Republican leader admitted that 20 Members of his caucus didn't want to approve another dime in spending. Now we are on the verge of passing more than \$900 billion.

Once an agreement is finalized, I will have a lot more to say about the contents of the bill and the process it took to achieve it. But for now, I am happy to report we have surmounted the final largest hurdle, and an ending is in sight. Let's get the job done together for the sake of the American people.

I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory call be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read the following:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Brian Noland, of Tennessee, to be a Member of the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority for a term expiring May 18, 2024.